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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 001131

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SUBJECT: TFH01: (S/NF) MICHELETTI RESIGNATION PROPOSAL

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Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary. Former President Carlos Flores and Verification Commissioner Arturo Corrales told the Ambassador and DCM that they were pushing for the de facto regime head Roberto Micheletti to resign and be replaced by a government of national unity, whether or not President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya reengaged with the San Jose-Tegucigalpa Accord in order to change the political equation and allow for international support of the election. They said that Micheletti was open to the idea. The Ambassador plans to meet with Zelaya to make a final pitch to get him to reengage. Flores and Corrales argued that Zelaya should not be allowed to abandon the accord and needed to bring his concerns to the Verification Commission. End Summary.

¶2. (S/NF) The Ambassador and DCM met with former President Carlos Flores and Arturo Corrales, de facto regime head Roberto Micheletti's representative to the Verification Commission, to discuss the possible resignation of Micheletti in an effort to salvage the San Jose-Tegucigalpa Accord on November 9. Flores and Corrales said that Micheletti is now seriously considering stepping down. The proposal they are advocating is for Micheletti to create a government of national unity and then take a "leave of absence" from his position; they said that this needed to happen very quickly in order to save the accord. (Note: The Ambassador plans to meet with President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya today to make a final pitch for him to reengage with the accord. End Note.)

¶3. (S/NF) Even in the event that Zelaya is not willing to go back to the table under the accord, the Ambassador told Flores and Corrales that it was important for Micheletti still to be willing to step down unilaterally. He made the case that if Micheletti stepped down now, he would show the world that his first interest was the well-being of the Honduran people. Such an action could change the political equation and international perceptions and allow for greater international support for the November 29 election. The Ambassador also emphasized that such a bold step would put ALBA and Chavez on the defensive. Finally, he noted that such a decision would ensure that Micheletti would earn the strong respect and goodwill of many in the international

community.

¶4. (S/NF) Both Flores and Corrales agreed that Micheletti needed to resign whatever the position of Zelaya and said that he was now open to the idea. They described a meeting at the Casa Presidencial over the weekend, attended by Corrales and Vilma Morales, one of Micheletti's negotiators on the accord, in which the topic was discussed. (Note: The Ambassador spoke to Morales on Saturday and made the case for Micheletti's resignation. She agreed that it needed to be done; only stressing the need to do it legally.) Corrales said a potential obstacle was that several of Micheletti's advisors, including a woman named Kenya Lima (linked to the U.S. lobbyists hired by Micheletti), might advise him to take a hard line.

¶5. (S/NF) Flores and Corrales believe that if Zelaya does not agree to engage, Micheletti should create a government of national unity with a highly respected Honduran as Minister of Governance. (Note: This minister could serve as acting president). They said it seemed that Micheletti was considering Juan Ferrera for that position. Ferrera is a businessman, well known to the Embassy, and a prominent civil society leader. Although on the anti-Zelaya side, he is respected for his integrity. Until recently he was the President of the National Anti-corruption Commission - a watchdog group that took the lead in fighting corruption. Flores and Corrales suggested that Micheletti could ask Congress for a leave of absence (possibly going to the Bay Islands), leaving the government in the hands of Ferrera and the government of national unity through the elections. Corrales said that if Micheletti took a leave of absence he would agree not to issue any statements and to leave the issue of Zelaya's restoration in the hands of Congress, which would vote on the question possibly after the elections.

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Corrales said that once Micheletti stepped down, he believed that he would have little or no interest in returning to power.

¶6. (S/NF) Flores and Corrales said that Zelaya should not be allowed to so easily weasel out of the accord. Corrales said he planned to send a letter of protest to the other members of the Verification Commission stating that if Zelaya objected to the way the accord was being implemented, he needed to bring his concerns before the Verification Commission, as called for in the accord. Flores and Corrales expressed concern that Verification Commission member and former President Ricardo Lagos, under pressure from the Rio Group, would not provide strong support for the accord. They also lamented recent statements by President Oscar Arias criticizing Micheletti's lack of good faith in fully complying with agreement terms.

¶7. (S/NF) Comment: We will continue to press for Micheletti to step aside, to be replaced by a government of national unity. We will also argue that it is the best step for Honduras, that it will help defuse Chavez and that it will help repair Micheletti's personal relations with the U.S.
LLORENS